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New Curator at Milwaukee Art Museum: Off the Cuff with Brandon Ruud

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New Curator at Milwaukee Art Museum

Off the Cuff with Brandon Ruud

By [Curtis L. Carter \(by-author-146-1.html\)](#)



In April, Brandon Ruud joined the curatorial staff of the Milwaukee Art Museum where he is responsible for oversight, development and presentation of the collection of American art and decorative arts. He replaces William Rudolph who left the Museum last year for a position at the San Antonio Museum of Art.

What was your previous museum experience?

Most recently, I served as curator of American art at Sheldon Museum of Art at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and previously in various curatorial roles at the Art Institute of Chicago and at Joslyn Art Museum in Omaha, Neb.

What are your impressions of life in Milwaukee?

I am thrilled to be in Milwaukee. During my 10 years in Chicago I made numerous trips to Milwaukee and Wisconsin to visit museums and enjoy its cultural and scenic offerings. I am excited to become a part of Milwaukee's arts community and explore the diverse cultural life that the city offers.

What do you see as your greatest challenges as the new curator of American art

and decorative arts?

The immediate challenges center on the presentation of the American collections, as part of the museum's expansion and renovation and the reinstallation of its permanent collection galleries. Moving the American collection to the upper floor of the David Kahler Building with some 16,000 square feet of exhibition space will allow for showing a greater range of the works in the collection. It will also offer greater space for focused exhibitions devoted to American art.

Are there special assets here that were not available in your previous positions?

Yes. One of these is the opportunity for collaboration with the Chipstone Foundation. Located in Fox Point, Chipstone represents one of the leading collections devoted to material culture and decorative arts in America, and has a passionate staff devoted to innovative presentation and thinking. Another is the impressive Layton Art Collection, which strengthens the museum's holdings in American art. The city and museum's embrace of and support for American art is also a valuable asset.

What are your ideas for future development of the American collection?

It is important to think strategically about the needs of the collection and to wait to identify major pieces for acquisition. One of my priorities will be to acquire a significant large-scale 19th-century marble sculpture. This is needed to complement existing strengths in the museum's 19th-century collection. I would also like to see more works by women artists enter the collection.

How will you achieve these acquisitions?

Development of support for acquisitions is a major portion of the role of the curator. It is important for a curator to cultivate relations with collectors, patrons and the public who are supportive and enthusiastic, as well as with gallerists who can assist with identifying relevant key works. Long-term loans, whether private or public, also present an opportunity to add context and depth, and we hope to work with both collectors and sister institutions to achieve these goals.

What is a curator's role in fostering interest in art from an earlier time?

Reinterpretation of the American collection, offering it in a different light, will be my aim, showing how historic art is still relevant to many issues facing us today: from commerce and immigration to environmentalism and social justice. Innovative uses of new media have an important role to play.